

# Galloway National Park

## Initial Survey of Tourism Businesses

21 October – 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024  
SUMMARY REPORT OF ALL RESPONSES

### Executive Summary:

Between 21<sup>st</sup> October and 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024, 103 tourism businesses in Dumfries and Galloway, South Ayrshire and East Ayrshire completed a short online survey sharing their initial views on the proposed Galloway National Park. This was before [full information](#) was published by Nature Scot about the proposition, so should be viewed in this light.

#### **Support for a national park:**

Roughly two thirds of respondents (66%) supported the idea of a national park and under one third (30%) opposed the proposition. There was a high degree of polarisation, with over 80% of respondents having a “strong” view on this subject: 53% were “strongly supportive” of a national park, with 27% “strongly opposed”.

Generally, most hotels, B&Bs, food and drink providers, retailers and ‘other’ businesses, were strongly in favour of a national park. A significant number (but still a minority) of self-catering businesses and campsites/aires were opposed to a national park: for many of these, tourism is a secondary part of their business (for example, a farm which also has a self-catering property). Those who support the national park generally employed more people (383 total, 5.63 average) than those who opposed (84 total, average 2.27); those undecided employed 28, average 7.

The open/qualitative questions showed the strength of feeling in this debate, with most respondents clearly either passionately in favour or opposed to the idea of national park. Many of those opposed to the idea could see no possible benefits of a national park and many of those who supported the idea could see no possible issues with the proposition.

#### **Reasons for and against:**

Those in favour of a national park typically cited: the economic benefits of attracting more visitors, the importance of protecting nature and bio-diversity, creating more jobs to retain more young people, supporting businesses to stay open all year, increasing investment in amenities.

Those against typically cited: concerns about over-tourism, litter and parking; the impact on infrastructure; increased bureaucracy; loss of affordable housing; loss of peace and tranquillity; the impact on farming; issues with planning; and the lack of obvious benefits.

Many of the same points were used both by those for and against a national park, including: the need for local jobs, retaining young people, preserving nature, and retaining what is so special about Galloway.

#### **Impact on business:**

78% of respondents said they felt a national park would have a positive impact on their business (52% “strongly positive”, 25% “slightly positive”). Just under 11% said it would have a “strongly negative” impact, with under 4% “slightly negative” and 8% “no effect” or “don’t know”.

**S.W.O.T. analysis:**

*Strengths* of a national park identified included: increased visitor numbers and spend, protection of nature, landscape and biodiversity; building destination profile; job creation; infrastructure investment; and secure, long-term funding and inward investment.

*Weaknesses* identified included: over-tourism, exceeding the capacity of rural infrastructure; loss of affordable housing; increased traffic; limiting development and growth; pollution, litter and fly tipping; bureaucracy, red tape and regulation; and planning permission issues.

*Opportunities* identified included: job creation; rejuvenation of the area; preservation of the natural environment and bio-diversity; increased revenue and investment; support for businesses; and help managing outdoor spaces, tourism and the environment.

*Threats* identified included: loss of affordable housing; increased traffic; litter and pollution; dirty campers / motor homes not contributing to the economy; damage to natural environment and bio-diversity; over-tourism; and tensions and hostility with local communities.

**Size, administration and powers:**

With regards the *size* of a park, those in favour thought the larger the better, those opposed favoured a smaller park. A number of suggestions of what should/shouldn't be included were submitted but without clear trends; a number felt all the Galloway Forest should be included.

With regards the *administration* of a possible national park, there was a strong consensus that it should be governed by a locally-led board and officers should live and work in the area; it should keep administration and bureaucracy to a minimum with a focus on delivery and clear accountability. Clearly many respondents had real concerns it could be an unwieldy bureaucracy.

With regards the *powers* of a possible national park, many respondents seemed to prefer a lighter-touch model, which focused on protecting nature and bio-diversity in a consensual and consultative way, with real accountability.

88% of respondents said they would feed into the formal Nature Scot consultations, 11% weren't sure and only 2% said they would not.

In the final comments section of the survey, some continued to underline their objection to a park while others were passionate in making a case as to why the opportunity should be embraced. A number of respondents raised real concern at the negativity and division around this increasingly polarised debate which risked ripping communities apart and making visitors feel unwelcome. Some respondents shared concerns about feeling too intimidated to make a positive case for a national park and highlighted the need for more factual information in this debate.

**Conclusion:**

The results of this initial survey suggest most visitor economy businesses in the area support the idea of a Galloway National Park; however, there is a significant minority that passionately oppose it and clearly have strong concerns. This has become a polarised and in places angry debate, with at times the same arguments used by both sides in diametrically opposed ways. There is a need - on both sides - for more clear information, sober analysis, respectful dialogue and myth-busting.

The one area where there seemed to be broad consensus was that, if a national park is created, it should be locally and efficiently run, without significant bureaucracy and administration.

It should be emphasised that this survey only considered the views of local visitor economy businesses, not the wider public or other industries. **All those in D&G, South and East Ayrshire are encouraged to complete the [formal NatureScot consultation](#) before 14<sup>th</sup> February 2025, to have their views heard.**

## **About the Survey:**

### **Design and dissemination:**

Between 21<sup>st</sup> October and 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024 tourism businesses in Dumfries and Galloway, South and East Ayrshire were invited to complete a short online survey sharing their initial views on the proposed Galloway National Park. The survey was designed to broadly emulate other recent surveys on this topic which have looked to gauge views of other particular sectors, to afford a degree of comparison.

The wording when sending the survey out was studiously neutral, so as to not bias the results. The link to the survey was shared by the South of Scotland Destination Alliance, VisitScotland, the Biosphere, the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions, Scottish Tourism Alliance, the Chamber of Commerce, Go Rural, Scoto and the No to Galloway National Park Facebook group.

This survey was concluded on the 4<sup>th</sup> November, shortly before Nature Scot launched the [formal consultation](#), which will run until 14<sup>th</sup> February 2025. Although the full results of this survey will be shared with Nature Scot, everyone in the area is strongly encouraged to take part in the formal consultation even if they completed this survey. Those completing this survey did not have access to the [information released by Nature Scot](#) w/c4th November, which gives considerably more detail about the proposal.

This Summary Report summarises the key points given to the open/qualitative questions, with the most frequently cited points at the start: this aids readability and maintains anonymity. The full data-set of all verbatim entries has been submitted to NatureScot.

### **Validation:**

It was made clear that there would be a process of validation through which only identifiable tourism businesses would be included in the end results. The process of validation involved an internet search of up 1-2 minutes per entry where it was not clear whether a respondent was part of a tourism business. If, after that time, evidence of a tourism business currently trading was not found, the submission was not included. In total 11, submissions were not included in the end results for this reason.

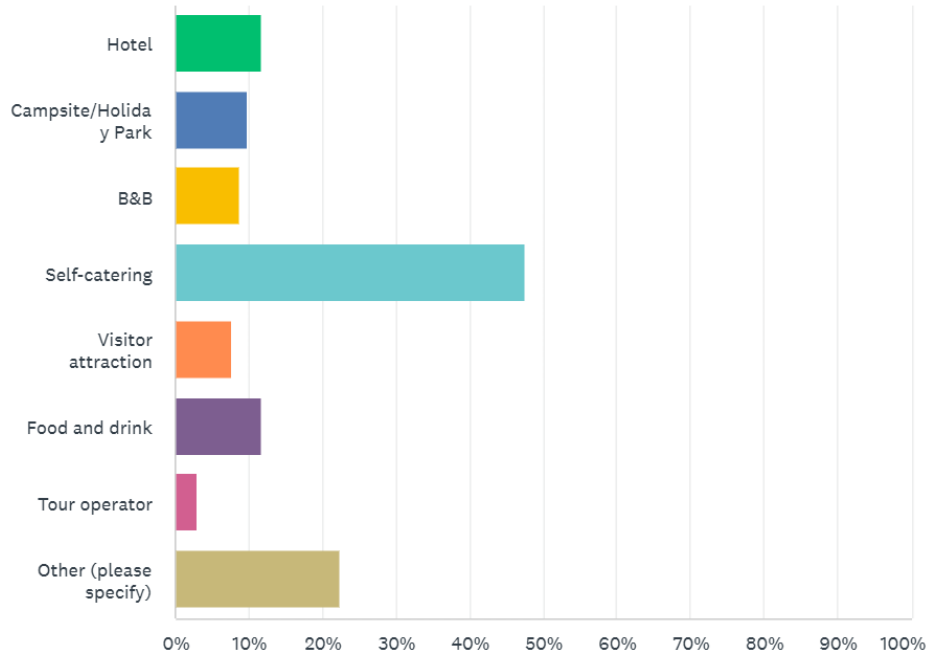
There was, of course, some degree of discretion as to what is a 'tourism business' and through this process we erred on the side of inclusion if it could be reasonably argued that a major component of their trade was directly with visitors to the area. For example, newsagents, food shops, gift shops and antique shops were all included but a stone mason, estate agent, haulage company, a walker and an IT company were not.

A further two were removed as they were duplications – with two businesses making more than one submission.

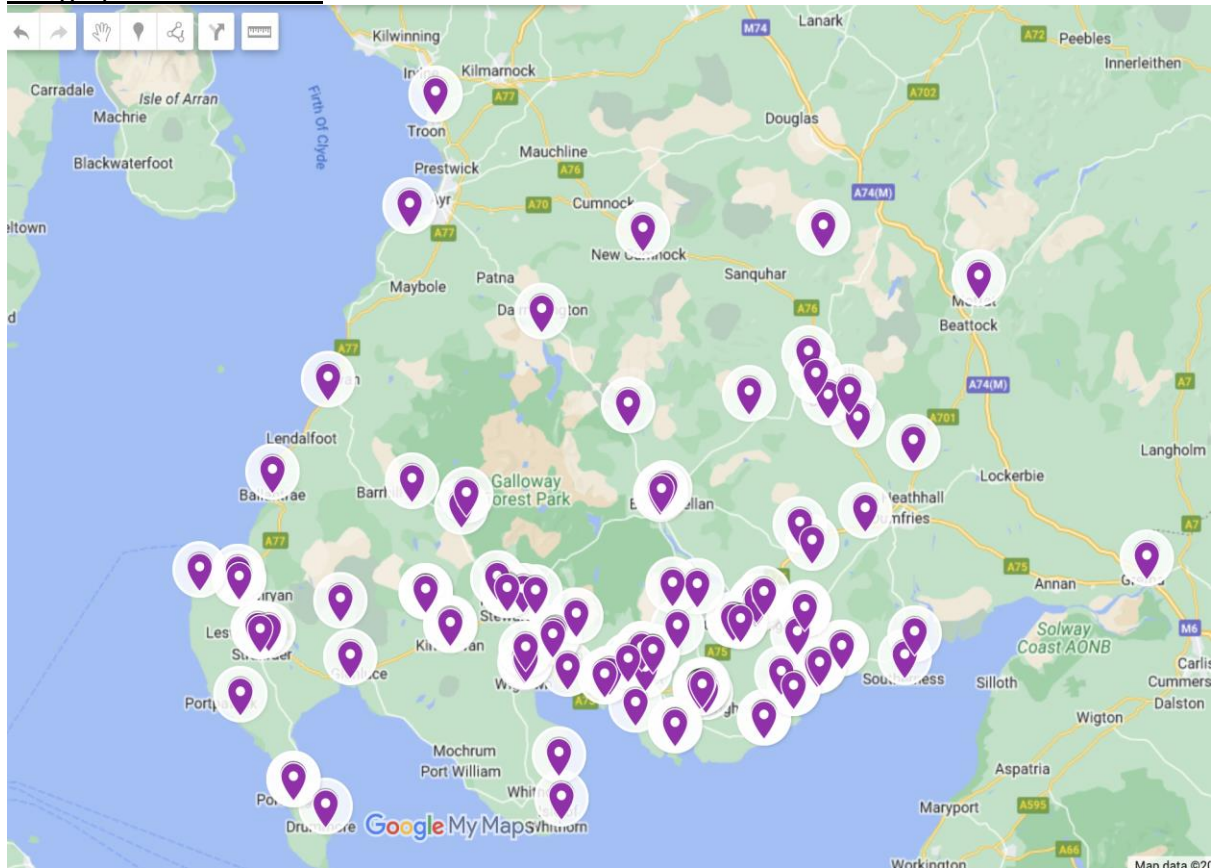
This process of validation was followed to ensure the results represented the views of this specific stated industry. There are other surveys of other sectors on this topic and the formal Nature Scot consultation, which is open to all, has now opened. In total, at the end of validation, 103 submissions were included in the results given.

## Participation:

## Business Types:



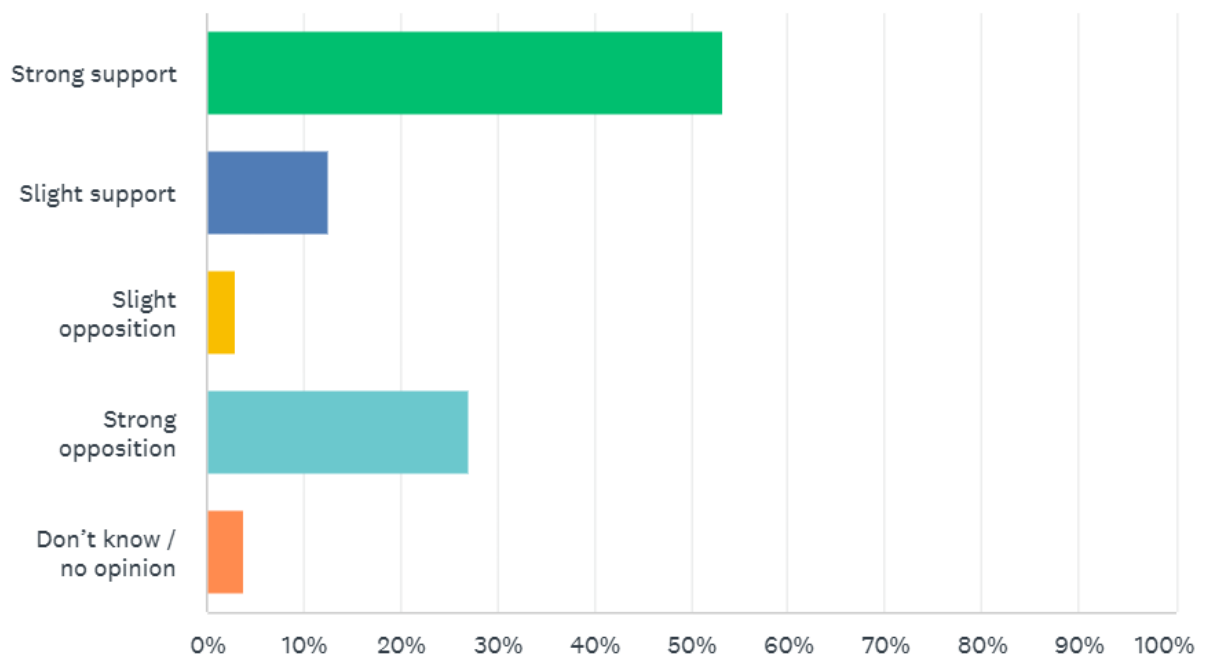
## Geographic distribution:



## RESULTS:

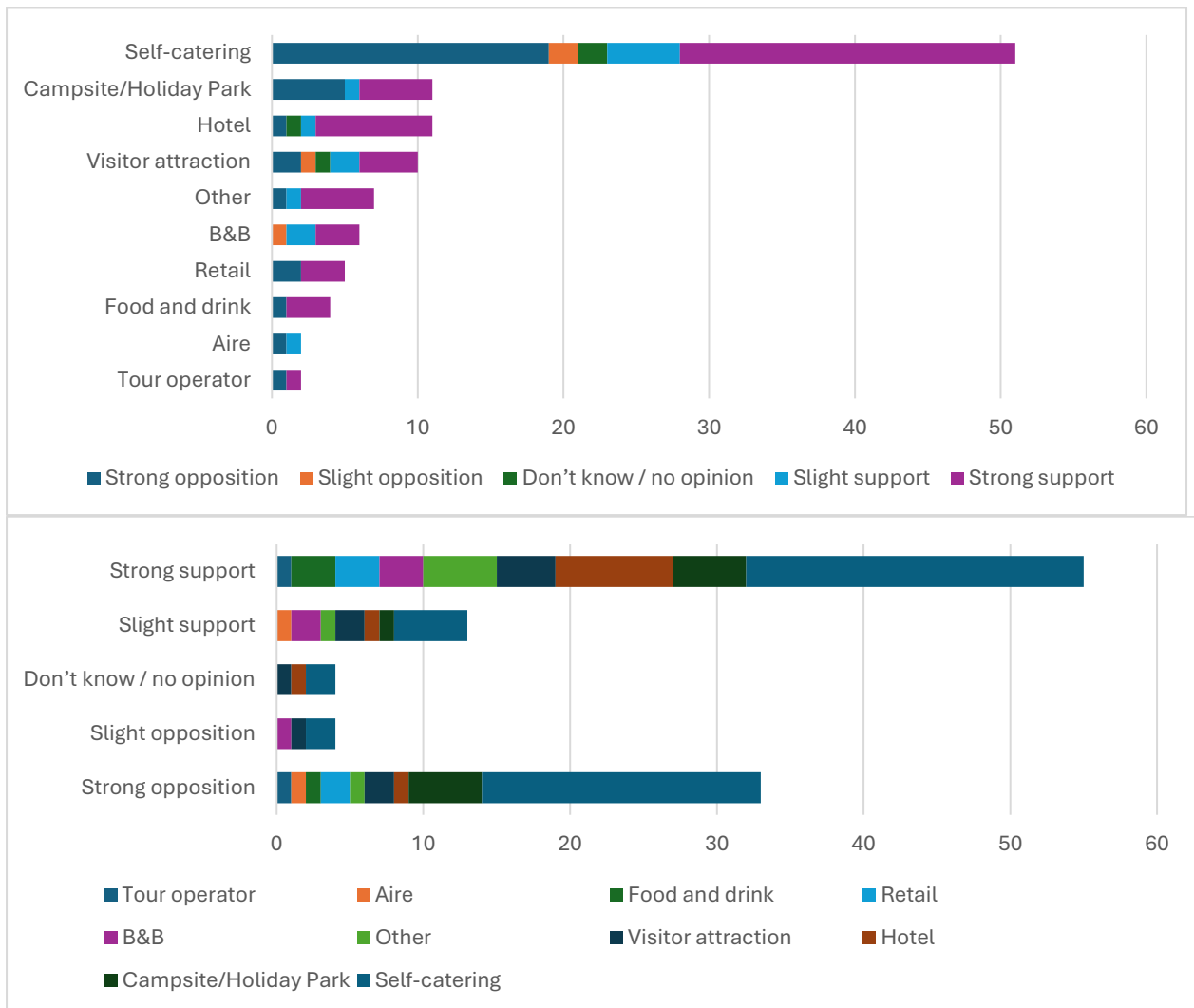
### Support/Opposition for the National Park:

To the question 'Do you support the idea of a Galloway National Park being established at this stage', 66% supported the proposal, 30% opposed the proposal and 4% were undecided.

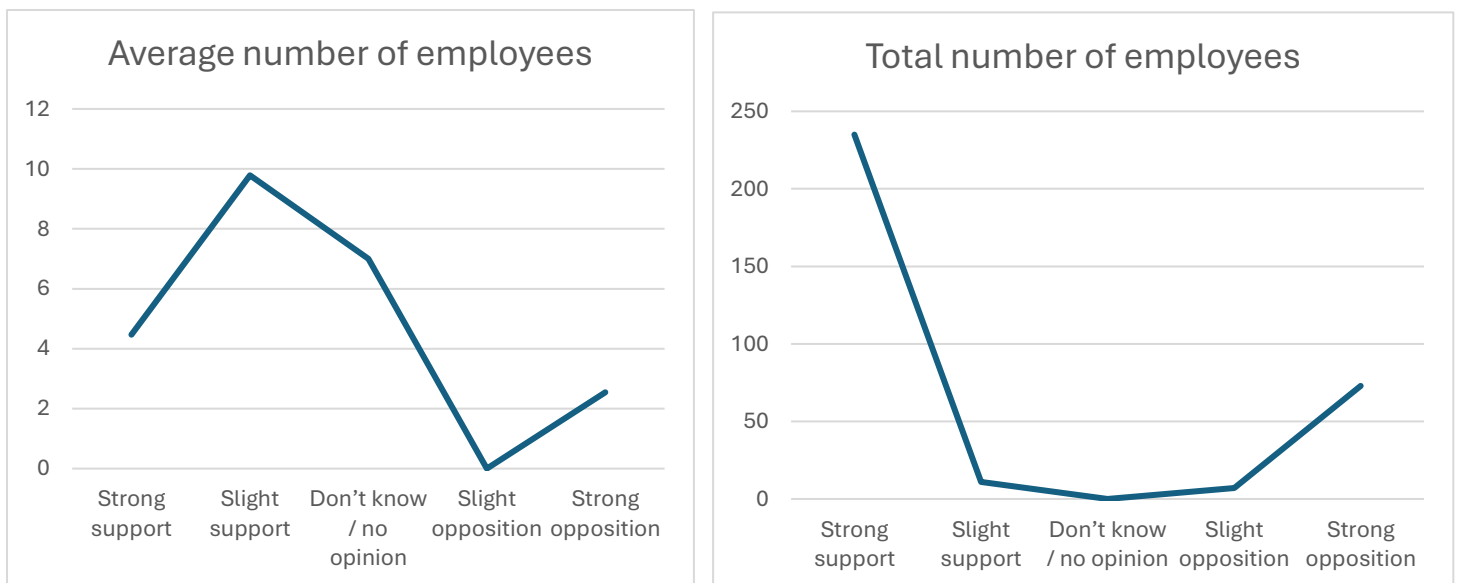


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Strong support	53.40%	55
▼ Slight support	12.62%	13
▼ Slight opposition	2.91%	3
▼ Strong opposition	27.18%	28
▼ Don't know / no opinion	3.88%	4
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>103</b>

### Disaggregation of support by business type:



### Disaggregation of support by business size:



Support: 383 total, 5.63 av. (n68). Oppose: 84 total, 2.27 av. (n37). Don't know: 28, 7 av. (n4)

## **Reasons for supporting/opposing:**

*[N.B. The remainder of the survey results are qualitative. In this summary report, the key points are summarised roughly in order, so the most frequently cited points appear at the top. This is to make the report a readable length but also for reasons of GDPR as not all respondents gave permission for their verbatim words to appear. Responses which did not relate to the question asked have not been included in this summary. The full verbatim data of all responses has been shared with Nature Scot to inform their report to Scottish Government]*

When asked '**What are the key reasons for your current position?**'

Those who **strongly support** the national park said:

- Increases visitor economy by attracting more tourists
- Protects biodiversity and landscape
- Increased jobs so can retain young people
- Supports businesses
- Help businesses stay open year-round
- Raise the profile of the area as a destination
- Increase investment in amenities, paths, signs etc
- Spread tourists across Scotland
- Attract reliable funding
- Bring organisations together to collaborate
- Feel good factor
- Support the Biosphere
- Greater local say

Those who **slightly support** the national park said:

- Jobs for young people, addressing ageing population
- Improvements in roads and infrastructure
- Don't want wind turbines
- Worried about planning permission
- Nervous about bureaucracy
- Nervous about impact on farming

Those who **slightly oppose** the national park said:

- Concerns about bureaucracy, planning, infrastructure. traffic volume, toilets.

Those who **strongly oppose** the national park said:

- Irresponsible visitors: litter, parking, dog fouling, dirty camping, etc
- Impact on infrastructure
- Increased traffic and impact on roads
- Increased bureaucracy which will stifle business

- Lack of local support
- Increased house prices
- Planning concerns
- Loss of peace and tranquillity: what visitors want
- Lack of evidence of benefit from other National Parks
- Lack of information on proposal
- Unclear where funds will come from
- Impact on demography: young people will leave
- Negative impact on farming
- Disagree with boundaries
- Existing demarcations (Biosphere, dark skies etc)
- Motorhomes
- Money could be better spent elsewhere

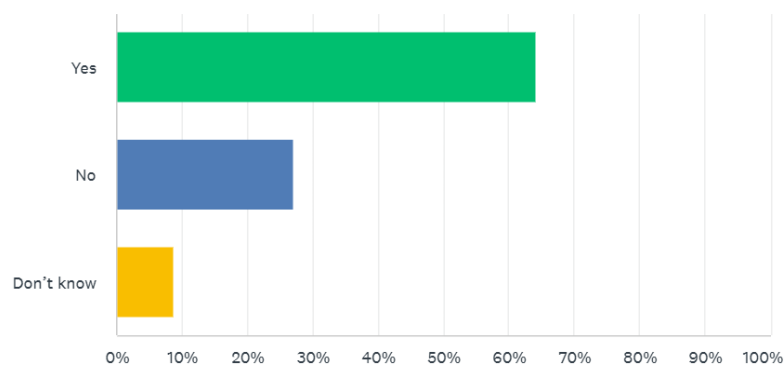
Those who are **undecided** said:

- Lack of real information in a polarised and angry debate

### **Impact on Responsible Tourism Strategy:**

Overall, do you think a new National Park could contribute positively to the implementation of the South of Scotland Responsible Tourism Strategy?

Answered: 103 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	64.08% 66
No	27.18% 28
Don't know	8.74% 9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>103</b>

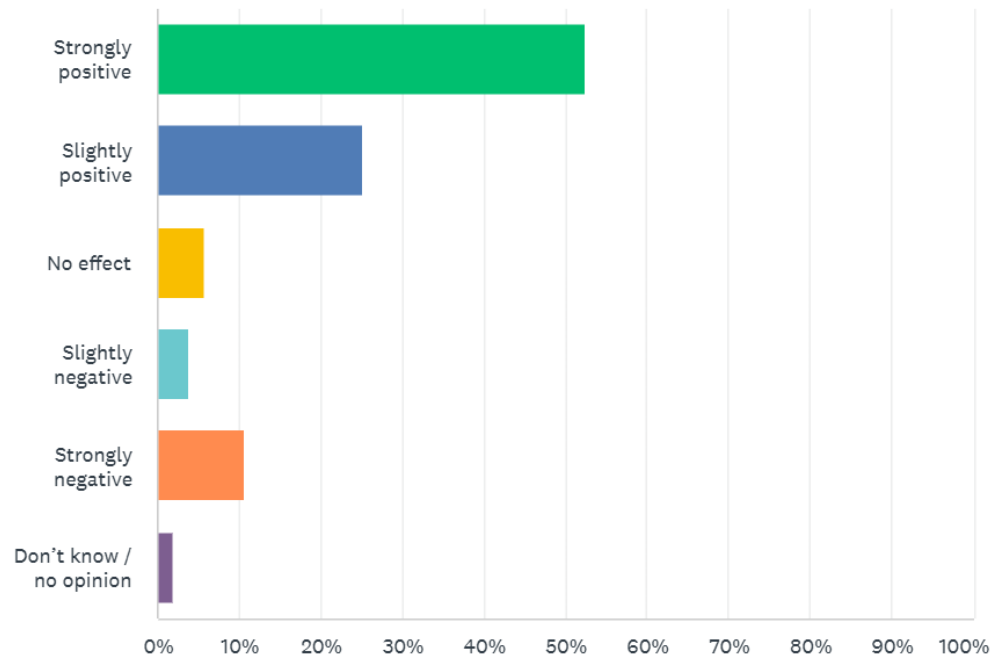


## Perceived Impact on Business:

When asked the question ‘**How do you feel a National Park would impact your business?**’ 78% said it would have a positive impact and 15% said it would have a negative impact,

### How do you feel a National Park would impact your business?

Answered: 103 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly positive	52.43% 54
Slightly positive	25.24% 26
No effect	5.83% 6
Slightly negative	3.88% 4
Strongly negative	10.68% 11
Don't know / no opinion	1.94% 2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>103</b>

## Reason for impact on perceived business:

When asked ‘**What are the key reasons for this?**’

Those who said it would have a **strong positive** impact commented:

- More visitors and more customers
- Increased profile for destination
- Extend the visitor season
- Needed to keep the business trading
- Preserve the nature and landscape which people come for

- Opportunities for local businesses
- Increase occupancy
- Make community interest companies financially sustainable
- Economic regeneration
- Investment in footpaths and visitor management
- Save high streets by increasing footfall

Those who said it would have a **slight positive** impact commented:

- More visitors/customers
- Increased destination profile
- Extends visitor season
- Concerns about:
  - o over tourism (especially in summer)
  - o motorhomes
  - o could lead to future visitor levy
- Keen for more information, especially on planning

Those who said it would have a **slight negative** impact commented:

- Negative impact of high visitor numbers
- Workforce issues

Those who said it would have a **strong negative** impact commented:

- Weak infrastructure
- Too many tourists already
- Too many campervans
- Honeypot pressures
- Conflict between tourism and agriculture
- Bureaucracy
- Pressure on bad roads
- Planning issues
- Duplication of Biosphere
- Lose sense of peace and tranquillity which visitors want
- Dirty camping and motorhomes
- Business already at capacity

Those who said it would have a **no impact** commented:

- Business already at capacity
- Need more information
- Lack of roads infrastructure
- Loss of peace and quiet
- Bureaucracy
- Duplication with Biosphere

Those who said **don't know / no opinion** commented:

- Already at capacity
- Loss of peace and quiet
- Lack of visitor infrastructure

## **S.W.O.T. Analysis:**

### **Strengths:**

When asked 'What do you think the potential strengths of a Galloway National Park could be?' respondents commented:

- Increase visitor numbers and spend
- Protection of nature, landscape and biodiversity
- Build destination profile
- Jobs creation
- Infrastructure investment
- Secure, long-term funding for the area
- Attract new inward investment
- Business opportunities
- Visitor management
- Extend the visitor season
- Attract new businesses
- Gives the area a quality endorsement
- More investment and revenue for local businesses
- Protect local identity for future generations
- Opportunities for outdoor activities
- Retaining young people
- Funding for Biosphere's work
- Scrutiny on polluters
- Light touch NP, working with agriculture and forestry
- Improved signage
- Attract professionals such as doctors and teachers to the area (not just retirees)
- Economic regeneration
- Investment in transport
- Allow to develop as a world-leading cycling destination
- Increase price-point and wages
- Celebrate local culture and history
- Expand horse riding trails
- Save derelict properties
- Develop Robert Burns tourism

## **Weaknesses:**

When asked 'What do you think the potential strengths of a Galloway National Park could be?' respondents commented:

- Too many tourists
- Exceed the capacity of rural infrastructure
- Loss of affordable housing due to AirBnB and second homes
- Increased traffic
- Limit development and growth
- Pollution, litter and fly tipping
- Bureaucracy/'red tape' and regulation
- Issues getting planning permission
- Parking issues
- Make living and working here unpleasant
- Wildlife/nature will suffer
- Wild/dirty campers/motorhomes who do not contribute to the economy
- Issues with A75
- Railway
- Top-heavy Quangos / jobs for the boys
- Imposition of rules by Scottish Government
- Lack of local ownership/leadership
- Tension and division between residents and visitors
- Loss of local identity
- Lack of funding to meet visitor expectations
- Stress on NHS
- Young people leaving / more retirees
- Lack of wet weather attractions/destinations
- Lack of public transportation
- Reduction in leisure facilities like shooting
- Restrictions on the farming community
- Lack of accommodation
- Cost to run (more than Biosphere)
- Negativity from some landowners
- Worsen seasonality (visitors coming in summer)
- Too broad a geographic area
- Increased taxes on business
- Mountain Rescue will be stretched
- Undemocratic
- Poor record of other National Parks
- Difficulty for businesses getting staff
- High prices for locals in the pubs, restaurants, car parks
- Only create low paid jobs
- Lack of visitor centres
- Wildfires
- Lack of motorhome service stations/aires
- Dogs running wild
- Loss of peace and tranquillity

## **Opportunities:**

When asked 'What do you think the potential strengths of a Galloway National Park could be?' respondents commented:

- Jobs, especially for young people
- Rejuvenate the area
- Preserve natural environment and bio-diversity
- Increase revenue to the area
- New inward investment
- Support businesses
- Help manage outdoor spaces, tourism and the environment
- Create a vibrant community
- Improve infrastructure
- Grow the population
- More diversification within agriculture
- Return of farmers' markets
- Small landowners of unproductive land can develop sustainable, eco projects
- Better spread out visitors across Scotland
- Address seasonality challenge
- Increased awareness of the destination, including internationally
- Support local communities
- Reverse economic decline
- Environmental protections
- Better regulation of campervans
- Events etc within the Park
- Better public transport
- Reduction in wind and solar farms
- Affordable housing similar to Ardgeal, Kincaig
- Safeguard the heritage
- Opportunities for entrepreneurs
- Improving outdoor access for all
- Developing new tourism initiatives
- Rangers to combat littering and protect our beautiful area
- Cycling / green tourism destination
- Lift areas out of poverty
- Educational facilities for environmental, health and tourism professions
- Challenge the chokehold the region has on it from vested interests (the landed and farming lobby – who operate out of fear and self-protection)
- Incorporate the Dark Sky Park status / leadership

## **Threats:**

When asked 'What do you think the potential strengths of a Galloway National Park could be?' respondents commented:

- Loss of affordable housing
- Road traffic / too much pressure on poor road infrastructure
- Litter and pollution
- Wild/dirty campers / motor homes not contributing to the economy
- Damage to natural environment and bio-diversity
- Over-tourism
- Tensions and hostility with local community
- To lose the heart, soul and beauty of Galloway in a bid for commercialism and economic development
- Bureaucracy / duplication of work of the Council
- Loss of young people and depopulation
- Loss of agency to local land owners, farmers and foresters
- Lack of infrastructure (roads, hospitals, sewage etc)
- Restrictive policies around land use
- Not embracing the opportunity because of a vocal minority
- Car park fees
- Too many signs
- Wildfires
- Lack of Scottish Government funding
- Quangos lining their own pockets
- Water contamination
- Antisocial behaviour
- Loss of slow way of life
- Local apathy
- Planning restrictions
- Wind farms being forced on the area
- Scaremongering
- A poorly funded and badly managed park would give visitors a poor impression of the area
- Waste tax payers' money
- Sewage disposal
- Erosion on paths
- Decreased mental health of inhabitants
- Not democratically accountable
- Inadequate funding for visitor management
- Mismanagement & lack of maintenance.

## **Size/area of National Park:**

When asked **'Do you have any specific views on the size/area of the National Park?'**, respondents with an opinion commented:

- Lack of transparency about the park's size – should have been told exact area
- As large as possible
- As small as possible
- Should not include large areas of intensive agriculture and forestry
- Don't want it, at any size/geography
- Ayrshire should not be included as muddies the water
- Should include all of the Galloway Forest
- Following the present Biosphere footprint
- Include the towns in the area - Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbright and Dalbeattie
- Include the greatest diversity possible of landscapes, natural habitats, cultural interest, coastline and hills
- Include gateways such as Dalmellington, where employment benefits will be great.
- Include north of Dumfries, as beautiful
- Include Straiton and the upper Girvan Valley as scenic with good paths
- All of Dumfries & Galloway should be included.
- Surrounding land outside the park will become increasingly industrialised to compensate.
- Should not include productive agricultural land
- Kept to the areas of outstanding natural beauty
- Include Girvan
- Include Nith estuary and Dumfries
- From Gatehouse to the coast
- North of the A75, if at all.
- Further west towards Dumfries.
- Include Wigtownshire, Stranraer but not necessarily south Ayrshire
- Include the coastal areas, including the Machars, Rhins and South Ayrshire coasts and the hills/mountains to the north
- Should follow culturally / geographically relevant lines i.e. not cut a village in half just because a main road cuts through it
- Include Glenluce and coastal surroundings

## **Administration of National Park:**

When asked '**Do you have any specific views on the administration of the National Park?**', respondents with an opinion commented:

- Locally-elected board
- Officers should live and work in the area
- Not too much on administration/bureaucracy
- Focus on on-the-ground delivery/infrastructure
- Clear accountability
- Clear and well engaged Board that can balance a vision for the area with listening to local concerns
- Efficient and effective operation
- Administered as a business with businesspeople at its heart
- Not in the Council
- Not controlled by Scottish Government
- Utilise a derelict town centre building
- Light touch regulation
- Done through democratically elected D&G Council not through NPA
- Avoid having a small number of well-paid jobs
- Community-led
- Clear transparency about governance
- Guidance for local businesses
- Multi-agency approach
- Focus on conservation and protection of the environment
- Membership that represents all demographics that live and work within the proposed area
- A requirement to appease the powerful farming sector
- Avoid Loch Lomond's heavy-handed tactics
- Not just agricultural businesses/large farmers
- Staffed by enthusiastic people who love and believe in the park.
- Properly funded and managed
- Funded from Visitor Levy
- Strong voice for nature
- Residents committee perhaps involved in any local housing needs.
- The BEST people for this job
- Each of the key groups should be represented in the governance
- Must not just maintain the status quo would be a death knell
- Small Board and no huge organisational structure.



## **Powers of National Park:**

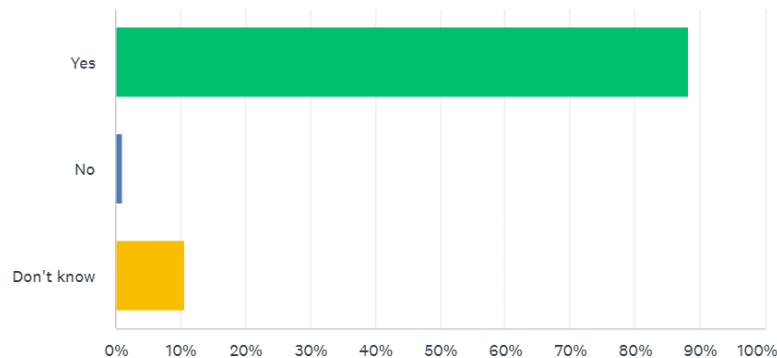
When asked '**Do you have any specific views on the Powers of the National Park?**', respondents with an opinion commented:

- Light touch – not too restrictive
- Not include planning (keep with Council)
- Avoid extra layer of bureaucracy
- Everything done at a local level by local people.
- Don't alienate landowners with red-tape
- Should be provision to dissolve it
- No powers
- Must be support to, and from, the local community
- Focused on protecting nature and bio-diversity
- Powers should be consensual amongst stakeholders
- Transparent consultation
- Profits reinvested in the National Park
- Not delusional power-hungry individuals
- Commit to community development for locals so that they are the first to benefit from national park status
- Democratically elected Board
- Support green tourism
- Those in charge should be locally accountable
- Should include planning
- Those who have a business interest in the area should not be excluded from being involved in its governance
- Not bloated quangos
- Representation from all industries hospitality, farming, transport and there should be not government compulsory powers but those agreed by the local board
- Needs legislative powers
- Focus on attracting inward investment aligned with community wealth building and bio-diversity
- Overseen and accountable to local authorities
- Planning should be 'supported' by GNP in terms of financial support to DGC to assist them hiring further planning officers.
- Focus on Protection, Enhancement, Checks and measures, and benefits to the majority
- Enhance and support work of other organisations like SEPA, the Biosphere, the Council, outdoor access, etc
- Spot fines for littering & vandalism including fire-starting & damage.
- Should not make it harder for farmers

## **Participation in NatureScot formal consultation:**

Do you plan to respond to the formal NatureScot consultation which will run November to January?

Answered: 103 Skipped: 0



## **Final comments:**

### **Final comments received from respondents included:**

- Don't need a National Park
- Bring it on! / should grab the positive opportunity
- Strong concern at the negativity and division which is ripping communities apart
- We can't publicly support due to the bullying and intimidation in the no campaign
- Too much blinkered self-interest from certain groups
- Want to better understand the case for and against – more factual info
- Learn lessons from areas with overtourism
- More time and consultation is needed
- Will put D&G on the map
- Will attract and diversify business
- Welcome evolution of D&G Green Tourism
- Should have consulted earlier
- The National Park Act (2000) is not the right vehicle to carry this project forward.
- Needed because of damage to the environment from industrial farming
- Concerned customers about the impact of a NP
- Support this in the faith that it is ran firmly and fairly
- It will kill Galloway
- Need a Third Option, not called a "National Park" which is more open and accommodating
- Let's take people with us
- Existing aires are at capacity – there is not the infrastructure
- Retirees don't want change, progress or new jobs.
- Waste of money